**UNIVERSITY OF 8 MAI 1945, GUELMA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Lecture in culture and civilization**

**First year, LMD**

**The City-State and Democracy**

In fact, Geography divided Greece into small regions; Because of this, the basic form of government in Greece was the **city-state**. A city-state is a state formed by a city and its surrounding lands. It generally included numerous villages. The colonies founded by Greeks around the Mediterranean were also city-states.

**Greek City-States**

City-states became common in Greece about 700 B.C. In Greek, the word for city-state was **polis**. Most city-**states were small.** Geographic features, such as mountains, limited their size. Athens and Sparta were the largest Greek city-states. Their lands included the plains that surrounded the center city. Most Greek **city-states controlled from 50 to 500 square miles** of territory and **had fewer than 20,000 residents**. Because the typical city-state was fairly small, the **people who lived there formed a close community.**

**Layout of the City**

The **center of city life was the agora**, an open space where people came for business and public gatherings. Male citizens met there to discuss politics. Festivals and athletic contests were held there. Statues, temples, and other public buildings were found in and around the agora.

Many cities had a fortified hilltop called an **acropolis**. **The word means “high city**.” At first, people used the acropolis mainly **for military purposes**; high places are easier to defend. Later the Greeks built temples and palaces on the flat tops of these hills. Ordinary houses were built along the hill’s base.

**Forms of Government**

Each city-state of Greece was independent. The people of each one figured out what kind of government worked best for them. As a result, different city-states used different political systems. Some city-states kept the same system of government for centuries. Others slowly changed from one system to another.

**Monarchy**

The earliest form of government in Greece was monarchy. A monarch is a king or queen who has **supreme** power. A monarchy is a government that a king or queen rules. Most Greek city-states started out as monarchies but changed over time to other forms of government.

**Aristocracy**

is a government ruled by the upper class of society or by nobility. In Greece, the nobles were people who were descended from high-born ancestors. Some aristocrats claimed that their ancestors were mythical heroes. The Greek city-state of Corinth began as a monarchy. Later, it was ruled by an aristocracy. Many other Greek city-states followed the same path. By the 700s B.C., the governments of most of the Greek city-states had changed from monarchies to aristocracies.

**Oligarchy** Some city-states developed a political system called **oligarchy**. Oligarchy means “rule by the few.” It is similar to aristocracy because in both cases, a minority group controls the government.

The main difference between an aristocracy and an oligarchy is the basis for the power of the ruling class. When aristocrats rule, they do so because of their inherited social class. In an oligarchy, people rule because of wealth or land ownership. In some Greek city-states, an oligarchy replaced aristocratic rule. In others, the aristocrats and the oligarchs shared power.

**Tyrants**

Poor people were not part of government in monarchies, aristocracies, or oligarchies. Often, the poor people came to resent being shut out of power, and at times, they showed their resentment by rebelling.

Sometimes a wealthy person who wanted to seize power made use of that anger. He would ask poor people to support him in becoming a leader. Such leaders were called tyrants. In Greece, a **tyrant** was someone who took power in an illegal way. Today the term ***tyrant***means a cruel leader. To the Greeks, a tyrant was simply someone who achieved the power of a king without being of royal birth. Some Greek tyrants worked to help the poor or created building programs to provide jobs. Others enacted laws canceling the debts that poor people owed to the wealthy.

Tyrants played an important role in the development of rule by the people. They helped to overthrow the oligarchies. They also showed that if common people united behind a leader, they could gain the power to make changes.

**COMPARING Governments**

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|  | **Monarchy** | **Oligarchy** | **Direct Democracy** |
| **Who ruled** | A king or queen ruled the government. | A small group of citizens ruled the government. | All citizens took part in the Government. |
| **Basis for rule** | Many kings or queens claimed that the gods gave them the right to rule. The monarch’s son usually was the next ruler. | Wealth or land ownership gave this group the right to rule. | Citizenship was usually limited to adult males. Sometimes other restrictions applied. |
| **Type of rule** | The king or queen often  had supreme power over everyone else. | The ruling group ran the government for their own purposes. | Decisions were made by voting. The majority won. |

**Athens Builds a Limited Democracy**

By helping tyrants rise to power, people in the lower classes realized they could influence government. As a result, they began to demand even more political power.

**Citizenship** One of the major legacies of ancient Greece is the idea of citizenship, which the Greeks introduced. In today’s world, a **citizen** is a person who is loyal to a country and who is **entitled** to protection by the government of that country**. In ancient Greece, only adult males could be citizens.** Other **restrictions** on citizenship varied in different city-states. Some limited citizenship to land owners. Others required having parents who were free citizens.

In much of ancient Greece, people of both upper and lower classes were citizens, but only upper-class citizens held power. By demanding political power, the lower-class citizens were asking for a major change to their society. Such changes do not happen quickly.

During the 500s B.C., two leaders in Athens made **gradual** reforms that gave people more power. Those leaders were Solon and Cleisthenes (KLYS•thuh•NEEZ).

**Solon**

In the 500s B.C., trouble stirred in Athens. Many poor farmers owed so much money that they were forced to work their land for someone else or to become slaves. The lower classes were growing angry with the rulers. About 594 B.C., the nobles elected Solon to lead Athens. He made reforms that helped prevent a revolt by the poor. First he freed people who had become enslaved because of debts. He made a law that no citizen could be enslaved.

Solon also organized citizens into four classes based on wealth, not birth. The richest men had the most power. Even so, this was still a fairer system than the old one that limited power to those of noble birth. The changes established by Solon allowed all citizens to serve in the assembly, the lawmaking body, and to help elect leaders. He also reformed the laws to make them less harsh.

**Cleisthenes**

Around 500 B.C., Cleisthenes increased the power of Athenian citizens even more.. He organized citizens into ten groups, known as tribes. The tribes were based on place of residence, instead of on wealth or family ties.

. Cleisthenes also formed the council that became known as the Council of Five Hundred.

**The Council of Five Hundred / : Direct Democracy**

The Council of Five Hundred was made up of 500 men, 50 men from each of the 10 tribes. Any citizen over the age of 30 was qualified to be a member. Each tribe chose the men by lot, or at random, to serve for a term of one year. Members could be re-elected only once. The yearly turnover allowed for a greater number of Athenian citizens to participate in their government at a high level.

Cleisthenes’ plan allowed members of the Council of Five Hundred to suggest laws to the assembly for debate and possible passage. The Council advised the assembly. Laws were passed by a majority vote in the assembly.

These changes moved Athens toward an early form of democracy. **Democracy** is a government in which the citizens make political decisions either directly or through elected representatives. **The Athenian style of democracy is called a direct democracy**. In such a system, all the citizens meet to decide on the laws. (Indirect democracy, in which people elect representatives to make laws, is more common today. The United States is an example.)

**Limited Democracy** Although Athens established a direct democracy, its benefits were limited. The government did not include all of the people who lived in the city-state. Only free adult males who were citizens could take part in the government.

**Citizens’ Responsibilities** Athenian citizens had several responsibilities. They had to serve in the army whenever they were needed. Under the changes brought about by Cleisthenes, each of the ten tribes was required to provide citizens for military duty. Athenian citizens were trained for warfare and were called upon to take up arms in times of actual war.